

## [James M. Mooney]

1

Folk stuff - Range lore [21?]

Gauthier. Sheldon F.

Rangelore.

Tarrant Co, Dist,. #7

Page #1

FC 240

James M. Mooney, 69, living at 961 W. Peach St. Fort Worth, Tarrant Co, Texas, was born at Abbeville, Lafayette [??], May 7, [1869?]. His father, A. W. Mooney, served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. He moved to Texas in 1869 and settled on a piece of land near Fort Worth, Tarrant Co,. He farmed for a short time and then moved to Scurry Co, Texas, in 1870 where he established a cattle ranch on Deep Creek.

James M. Mooney was reared in the saddle. He began to work as a regular hand at the age of 13 and continued in the cattle business during all of his active life.

His story of range life follows:

"My fater started to rear his family in Abbeville, LaFayette Co, Miss, prior to the Civil War. He served in the Confederate Army and after the close of the war he moved to Texas. The family was moved to Fort Worth, Tarrant Co. I was born the previous year on Mat 7.

"My father settled on a piece of land, adjacent ot Fort, Worth, when he came here and tried farming for about one year. Then in 1870, he moved to Scurry Co. Texas, and started a

## Library of Congress

cattle ranch located on Deep Creek. In a few years he, also, had herds ranging in the Red River section near Clarksville, and in Denton Co, near Bartinville.

"My oldest brother [?] J.M. Mooney, had charge of the Red River ranch and father's cousin Jack Mooney was in charge of the Denton Co, outfit. The total number of critters ranging ranging under our brand at one time, was 30,000 head.

"Father bought considerable cattle from East and South Texas. Those critters he [ranged?] on the Red River and [Denton?] Co, 2 ranges. When these herds numbered over 3,000 he would drive of bunch on the animals to the main ranch in Scurry Co.

"When the family first lit in the Scurry Co, section of Texas, there was no organized county. We lived in a dugout as [?] bunch of prairie dogs do. We crawled in and out of our hole and felt right proud of our home.

"Finally, after a few years, lumber was hauled, by [?] wagon and ox team, out of East Texas, to our ranch out of which father builded a ranch house and ranch home. Then we crawled out of our hole and started to live above ground.

"By the time we had the lumber home completed, Father had the two other [ranches?] going and we made a number of drags to and fro.

"On one of those drags he drove a team and took mother and me with him. I was just a kid, about eight years old, and was having a heap big time. Father was taking plenty of time, wanting to eye the country as we passed through, and we camped along the way while father would ride out skirting the surrounding country.

"I, as a kid will do, chased here and there out from the camp looking into things. One day while camping in Jack Co, on Squaw Creek, and father was on one of his rides, I was fooling around off a piece from the camp. A party of Indians came past where I was and picked me up. They tied me on a gray hoss and took me with them.

## Library of Congress

“When I failed to show up at the camp, my folks began to search for me. They soon spied the hoof tracks of the [hosses?] and concluded that I had been captured by the Indians.

3 Father rode to the first ranch and notified the folks about what had happened. They, in turn, set to spreading the news and it was not long until a fair size crowd had gathered for the purpose of trailing the Indians and recapturing me.

“When a party of Indians kidnaped a white child, it always caused the white folks to get mighty hot under the collar. Some of them folks, who gathered at the camp, were set on hitting the trail and to shot the redskins down where and when they were found, but father took a different stand from the others. He reasoned that, if I was still alive, he did not want to do anything which could cause the Indians to kill me. Therefore, he suggested that the party quietly trail the Indians and attempt to sneak upon their camp and recapture me.

“The Indians belonged to the Quana Parker tribe. What they intended to do with me, I do not know. I reckon that they intended to hold me for ransome.

“They used me kindly and put themselves out to make me comfortable. Two of them could talk English well enough for me to easily understand them. I was promised everything under the sun, the best pony and saddle, the best gun, the best hunting and beautiful clothes.

“In those days Indian depredations were often spoken of and I had heard the older folks discuss the many cruel acts done by the Indians. With those discussions in mind, at first[,] I was scared stiff, but the kind treatment and promises that I was receiving caused me to thaw out. It was not long until I was chummy with them. Kid like, I was hankering for the big time ahead. 4 “The first day we traveled fast and far into the night before we camped. I recall that I became so sleepy it was impossible for me to keep my peepers open. If I had not been tied on the hoss I would have fallen off. After we stopped to camp for the night, and ate some jerk beef, they rolled me into a [?] blanket and I fell to sleeping pronto. I was awaked at the break of day and we started at once, eating some more jerk

## Library of Congress

beef as we rode. We did not travel as fast the second day, as we did the first, I was in the lead with two Indians and about 10 stayed far to the rear. Again that day we traveled far into the night before we camped. The third day, at mid-day, we reached the Indian Indian's camp. I was turned loose and the Indian children were soon playing with me.

"A number of the Indians kids and I were romping, off a short piece from a row of teepees, just after sun set and there I was recaptured. Suddenly several men ran up to where we kids were and one of them grabbed me, it was my father. He ran with me while the other men backed away with leveled guns. Father soon arrived where there were about 25 cowhands, all well armed, waiting on their hosses. So as the other men, those that ran in to get me with father, reached their mounts, the party rode away with not one shot being fired. No doubt we were hitting the trail at top speed by the time the Indians got wise to what had taken place.

"Father often talked about recapturing me during the later years. He explained how they trailed the Indians, keeping far enough at [?] the rear to keep their presence from being known 5 to the Indians. The purpose was to throw the Indians of their guard and in that father's method was successful, which was showed by the Indian's action after they reached their camp.

"When father spied the camp, [withbhis?] spy glass, he moved up slowly to where we children could be seen. He then waited for his cjance to run in a grab me.

"I grew up in the saddle and at the age of 13 was helping on the range. By the time I had reached the age of 15 years, I was taking my regular turn at all the different jobs. I pulled a job at the age of 15 that I must chin about.

"Joe Street was interested in some critters withfather with/father for a short spell. He had a son that was about 14 years old at the time I am going to tell about. The Street boy and I were sent to the Denton Co, range for some 500 critters which were wanted to make up a

## Library of Congress

herd for a drive to market. Father instructed me to pick up all the fit critters and to hire two waddies as help with the drive back.

“Instead of picking up 500 we found 1000 fit critters. I was able to pick up only one hand to help us make the drive [back?], it was a young lad about my age, and we three boys started out with the herd. I expected to pick up another/ hand along the way before we had gone far. We drifted that 1000 herd across Wise, Parker and Palo Pinto Counties, without hitting up with any one wanting a job. Parker and Palo Pinto Counties, in those days, were our worst spots. There were cattle and hoss rustlers in there and a mighty close watch had to be kept over the herd. We three boys took that herd through those two counties without 6 losing any critters. After getting through that rough spot I didn't try to hire any help and the three of us drove those crittes through to the home range with only five critters short when we arrived.

“All our chuck and blankets were carried on pack hosses which we drifted along behind the cattle, that job the pack hosses had done many times before and those critters knew what to do. So the pack hosses gave us no trouble. I acted as trail boss, of course, I knew the trail well, because I had been over it many times before with father and others.

“Our greatest trouble was doing the nigh riding job, which could not be let up on. To meet that job with three men, tow of us rode while the other fellow slept. Every three hours one would change shift. Then during the day, if in a good drifting section and the weather was fair, one would catch a little shut-eye at the side of the trail. After getting through with the shut-eye business, the sleeper would ride fast for a piece to catch up with the herd. It would never be over three or four mile ahead.

“When driving a herd the critters are allowed to take their time, more or less and around seven miles is the distance the herd would travel in one day. Under the conditions that we three boys were working, we allowed the herd to take more time then usual and we were a month longer, making that drive, than it generally took.

## Library of Congress

"We had one little stampede which ended in about an hour and I guess that was when we lost the five that got away, which were short at the end of the drive. All we did with that stampede was to keep the critters from scattering until the 7 animals quit running.

"When we three kids arrived at the home ranch with that bunch of critters, father was plumb surprised and rattled that we were the top trail drivers of that country. I made many drives after that.

"Father worked a crew of 12 hands as regular workers and employed more during the busy season. During the roundup we used as high as 20 waddies.

"Among the steady hands were Ed McGinnes, who was our top hand and was called 'Dad' because he wore a long beard. There were Ossie Smith, Jim Green, Pack Wolf and Tom J. Mooney [?] of whom stayed with our [outfit for?] a long time.

"Pack Wolf, in later years, became Marshal of Snyder, Texas. Tom J. Mooney is a cousin of mine, later became a labor organizer. He was accused of placing a bomb on the street in San Francisco during the preparedness day parade in 1917. He was convicted and has been/ in prison since that time.

"I have often thought about them old waddies, a bunch of square fellows, that never looked for trouble, but let any person step on their toes until they were riled and then they were a bunch of wild cats. We lived a tough life, but a healthy one. We were in the open most of the time. The country was wild and full of wild game, such as buffalo, antelope, wild turkey and there were plenty of wolves and catamounts.

"The nearest ranch was the '7HS' owned by Scott, which was 15 miles away. The next nearest was the 'XIT', which was owned by Eastern people named Farrel. We had a 50 mile drag 8 to Colorado City, our trading point, so we did not see many people, except during the roundups then we, of course, would meet up with waddies from the other outfits.

## Library of Congress

“Our chuck was the usual kind fed waddies those days. Beef, beans, caned vegetables and sourdough bread. When we hankered for wild game, which we did often, some one of us would put in a short spell of hunting.

“During the late 70's and early 80's things were mighty tough in our section. We had to keep our eye peeled, night and day, to head off the rustlers and brand burners.

“The rustlers would lay for strays and at night they would put a scare into the herd for the purpose of getting a chance at the strays that, more or less, could always be found following a stomp.

“Brand burners gave about as much trouble as the rustlers. Our brand was the 'XIX' and that brand was changed into many different marks. I have seen the brand show up with the 'X' changed to star, thus '\*', and to a wheel thus, '[?]', also, made the brand read, thus, 'XTX'.

“There were many different methods used by the brand artist. Most of them used a wagon rod bent a little on the end. The rod when heated would be used as one would use a paint brush to paint a mark. A good artist, and there were many of them, could do a job that was hard to tell that the brand had been worked over, after the burn healed. Another method was to pick out the hair with a knife blade. The picking job was slower than the wagon rod method, but made a neater job and one that would heal quicker. Still another method was using the brand weed sap. I don't know the correct name for the weed, but it has a milk like sap. Whereever the sap of that weed was placed on the hair of a critter, the hair would come out and the hide would become raw. When the sore healed it looked like the scar of a branding iron. Father spent his time riding the range looking, with a spy glass, for rustlers and brand artist.

“All our critters were sold in the Northern market. After I became 19 years old I was the trail boss for our outfit and I made many drives over the Chisholm trail.

## Library of Congress

"The route called the Chisholm trail was a general course from Texas through the country up into Kansas. We left Texas at what was called Doans Crossing of the Red River, located at the Northern line of Walbarger Co. A man named Doan ran a store at the point and the crossing was named after him. There were two points wher crossing was nade, called the upper end lower crossing. From Doans crossing, the trail was in a general North, by West, direction. I reckon there was a variation in the course followed, covering a strip 30 miles wide. After crossing the Canadian River, the route was about straight North into Dodge City. The thing that goverened our route was the grazing conditions. We picked the way with the best grass, which also had water.

"The critters would be allowed to graze, taking plenty of time to get all the grass they needed. The critters were kept headed in the direction we were going and just drifted forward. 10 We would tavel around seven miles a day on the average.

"At one time I took 10.000 through. We divided the critters into three herds and worked 12 waddies with each bunch. Each crew had a cook, hoss wrangler, who looked after the hosses, trail boss who picked the route and the rest were pointers. In that 10,000 head were critters that belonged to other ranchers. Nearly every herd I drove, were critters that belonged to other folks. Is was a custom those days for the small rancher to have his market critters driven to the market with other herds and the small fellow would pay a proportion of the expense.

"I have left the market and started for home with thousands of dollars stuffed in my saddle bags, and never think of being robbed. When we camped at night, I would take the saddle off of my hoss and toss it on the ground, at the side of the chuck wagon, where it would lay until the next morning. I never worried about my waddies bothering the money. I had a dependable crew and always got along as a bunch of kittens, with one exception.

"We employed a few Indians on the range. One of the reasons for working Indians, was that they were mighty handy on the drive, because they knew the country like a book and



## Library of Congress

they made fair cowhands. A short spell before one of the drives I came upon Indian John sound asleep while on a night riding shift. When I saw that Indian sleeping and thought what would happen to the herd if they started on a run, it made me so mad that I whipped him with my rope. I did wrong, what I should have done was to shoot him, or make him drag off the range. That Indian decided to get even with me and came near putting me into trouble.

"We were on a drive and just before we reached the Doan's Crossing 'Dad McGinnes gives me the infor' that he had caught the drift of a talk that the Indians had, he said:

"Jim, your due to be branded when we reach the Territory'

"How come?" I saked him.

"I heard the Indians rattling and Indian John said he was going to kill you, after we reached the Territory and then hit out for the Indian Nation".

"Mc Ginnes could savy the Indian lingo and I knew he would not give me the wrong tip. I decided to settle the matter then and there. I went to John and said to him: 'John, I know what you calculated on doing to me when we reach the Territory, but we'll settle the matter here and now. I'll fight you with fist, knife or gun. You name the weapon'. He never said a word, but gave his hoss the gut hooks and hit for the Territory. That was the last I heard of John and the only trouble I had with a waddy.

"I always treated them as I would want to be treated, and fed the boys the best of chuck that we could get and use under the conditions we had to work and live.

"I sort of took pride of my ability to get along with people, white and Indians. The drivers had [mo?] or less trouble with the Indians while going through the Territory. On all my drives through that country all the trouble I had was to satisfy their demand for wohaw, which is what the Indian called beef. I never denied them wohaw. I always had some

## Library of Congress

critters that became 712 weak, and some became foot-sore. These I would have to drop and I saved those for the Indians. I knew that if I turned them down, the devils would stampede the herd, if necessary, to got wohaw.

"Many drivers failed to reckon how the Indian was educated in his native [state?]. The Indian reasoned that the Great Spirit put the animals and all things here for use of all the people. It was a hard thing for he to get through his conk, that he was not entitled to what he needed for food. The cattle driver that refused the Indians some beef had to meet stampeds, caused by the Indains so strays could be picked up.

"I had the usual stamped troubles every one had with the wild critters. They were always ready to run, especially the first couple week out. After a week or so the animals became accustomed to the drift and were not so skiddish.

"We always calculated on losing some critters, from sore-foot and sickness of various kinds, also, stampedes. I reckon that my losses on the average were about five percent. I had one stampede that took considerable silver out of my cloud. I lost 150 out of a 3,000 herd. Something had scared that herd plumb loco, just before a busting storm hit.

"The herd had bedded for the night, but became fretful and got up. They were moving about, because they sensed the on coming storm. All hands were on the ride trying to get the herd's mind off of the storm. Some of the boys were trying to sing, some [w?] were whistling, and some just talking to the cows. We were holding the herd and reckoned that we would be able to keep the bunch from running. Suddenly, we heard a number of the animals 13 snort, that told us that something had run into the herd and put the fear of hell into it. The whole herd were off at the same instance I knew that we were due for a big run that could not be stopped in the dark and that ment a lot of stray critters. I placed all the waddies, but three, on the point to hold the animals from going off in bunches. I took three men and went to the head of the herd and shot down a good number. Other animals piled on top of the dead critters and were stomped to death, but that checked the run.

## Library of Congress

That made it possible for us to put the others to milling. We held the herd after that and did not have any strays. All our losses was these shot and stomped to death, which numbered 150. I am sure that if I had tried to hold that herd, without shooting some, my loss would have been greater.

“While chinning about losing critters, it brings to my mind the dry spell of the middle 80's. It was in 1886-7, if I recall right. For a two year spell the rain fall wasn't enough to wet a bandanna. The second year all the water holes dried up, and also the grass. During that year I [watched?] critters milling and bellowing in bunches of hundreds. They could be heard for several miles. Thousands died from [starvation?], until, in places one could walk for miles stepping from one carcass to another.

“There was nothing that the ranchmen could about saving the animals. The whole section was in the same fix. Off where there was water, it was guarded to prevent herds from coming in. That was necessary to save the water for the cattle of the district. 14 “Another point worth talking about was the fact that there was no bad odor from those thousands of dead animals. The atmosphere of West Texas, is such that the carcasses just dried without rotting. That is, also, the reason jerk beef can be made in that country.

“When critters began to die in large numbers, skinning gangs went to work peeling the carcasses, but it was not long until the price of hides dropped so low that hides were not worth the trouble of peeling and peeling was not much trouble either.

“Two men with a hoss could peel the hide off of a carcass in a jiffy. While one man loosened the hide around the head of the critter, then cut a slit down the legs and belly, the other party would fasten a tie, on the loose hide at the head, to which a hoss was hitched. By the time the knifeman was done with the slitting, which could be done in a few munutes, the tie would be ready. Then with one fellow standing on the head of the carcass, the hoss would be started and the hide would peel off as a glove comes off of your hand.

## Library of Congress

“There was a drift fence, which extended from the vicinity of Colorado City, to the Double Mountain Fork of the Brazos River, a distance of around 60 miles. One of the purpose for which the drift fence was builded, was to hold the herds from drifting into territory beyond the fence. West of that fence was a rough brush section and when cattle got into it was a pert job to get the critters out. The drift fence [saved?] work and riders. We could always tell, two and three days ahead, when a norther was going to hit, [because?] the cattle began to drift for 15 shelter and by the [time?] the storm hit the herd would be drifting a-plenty. Before the days of the drift fence, holding the herd before a coming norther was like trying to stop a preacher from accepting donations.

“Along that drift fence, during that dry spell I saw carcasses laying one against the other. The critters drifted to the fence and there died.

“The drift fence were put up in many sections of the range country. The ranchmen ranging cattle in a section would jointly pay the cost and the expense of keeping the fence up. For each 25 miles of fence a rider was used who did nothing but ride the fence line and fix breaks. He carried a hammer, pliers, and staples in the saddle bag as his tools for the job.

“The cattle rustler, for a spell of time, caused more breaks in the drift fence then the cattle did. The drift fence was custard pie for the rustler, just before and during a storm. During such weather critters could be depended upon to be crowding the fence. The rustler would cut a gap in the fence through which the critters would drift and stray to hades. The rustler would watch the critters drift through the fence and then help the animals on their way.

“Our outfit always put on extra fence riders when a norther was headed our way. As soon as the cattle started drifting the extra riders would go on and stay untill the storm was over.

“Two different times my riders caught rustlers in the act of cutting the fence. But, for each time we caught them there were a hundred time we did not. We could always tell when 16 the rustler got away with some of our critters, because the rider would find the fence down.

## Library of Congress

"With the catching of them two bunches of rustlers, we had this satisfaction that they did not cut any more fences, unless they did it in hell.

"Now, to tell who I think was the best rider, best roper, best [shot?] and the top hand. The best all round hand was 'Dad' McGinnes. He was tops no matter where we put him, a natural cowhand. When shooting is being considered I put my father and Pack Wolf together. They could hit the mark moving or still. I have seen them hit a tree limb riding at top speed off 25 paces and they did not take eye aim. They just threw the gun down and pulled the trigger. I have seen them men shooting at 50 paces and put six shots into a tree mark the size of a dollar circle. Either man could do so as fast as their left hand could fan the hammer.

"What I mean by fanning the hammer is this: Them fellows would hold their gun in their right hand and hold the trigger back [?] steadily: [With?] the fleshy part of the left hand cock the hammer by swinging their hand against the hammer. As fast as the hammer came into firing position, it would fire and as fast as it fired the hammer would go back.

"I was conceded to be the best rider in our outfit and as good as any in that range section. All our horses were taken out of the wild herds that roamed that section West of us. I did most of the wrangling.

"The trick of wrangling is to learn to tell the horses next move before it makes the move. Also, learn to move meet the move. 17 "I [shly?] failed to bust two hosses and those [critters?] I stayed with until they ruined themselves.

"Fellow, was a fact is this, a cowhand had to be a good shot, roped and rider to stay on an [outfit?], some were better than others that was the difference.

## Library of Congress

"I stayed in the cow business all my life. I went through the dry spell, low prices and all, untill 1930 then went down. I then had a small stock farm in Denton Co.